

WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. An apparatus comprising:

a stored table of information indicative of a plurality of parties to be contacted and within a local community of interest, the stored table including a network address for each party within said local community of interest, and an indicator of which of at least two networks said address is a part;

at least two network interface units, each for interfacing to a separate one of the at least two networks for receiving requests to contact parties; and

a processor for determining if a request received is a request to contact a party that is within said local community of interest, and if so, completing the contact at the address and over the network stored in the table.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the two networks are the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and the Internet.

3. Apparatus of claim 2 wherein the processor is configured to contact a Domain Name Server (DNS) over the Internet if the party to be contacted is not in the local community of interest.

4. Apparatus of claim 3 further comprising a means to receive information from the DNS, to parse the information to ascertain a network address of a second server having a local community of interest of which the party to be contacted is a part, and for establishing communications over the Internet between said apparatus and said second server.

5. Apparatus of claim 4 further comprising a transmitter for monitoring signals received from the second server during call setup, and for determining when to begin transmission of audio communications.

6. A method of completing a telephone call from a calling party to a called party comprising:
receiving, at a first server, an identification of the called party and request to complete a call to said called party;

5 ascertaining, at said first server, if said first server is capable of completing the telephone call;

if not, contacting a second server to ascertain an identity of a third server that is capable of completing the telephone call;

establishing a data connection between said first and third servers;

10 establishing a communications session between said first and third servers;

completing the call by forming a communications channel between the third server and either a computer or a telephone associated with the called party, and wherein the third server includes a stored table specifying whether said communications channel is to be formed over a data network or a telephone network.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said identification of the called party includes an email address associated with the called party.

8. The method of claim 6 further comprising the steps of presenting a graphical user interface to the called party prior to said call and accepting input to update said table through said graphical user interface.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said table entry for said called party comprises plural addresses for contacting said called party, and wherein at least one of those addresses is that of a packet switched data network, and at least another of said addresses is that of a circuit switched network.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the address that is that of a packet switched network is an address connected to a computer with a soft phone.

11. A method of completing a call from a calling party to a called party, the called party having a network address on a packet switched network, method comprising:

dialing a number and thereby establishing a first connection between a called party and a first server to request said call;

transmitting over said first connection an identifier associated with the called party;

determining, from said identifier, whether said called party has a network address that is part of a community associated with said first server, and if so, completing the call by establishing a communications session over said data network between said first server and said called party;

if said called party is not part of a community associated with said first server, contacting a second server to determine a third server having a community of which said called party is a part, and

completing the call by establishing a data network connection between said first server and said third server, and between said third server.

12. The method of claim 11 further comprising the step of, if said called party is not a part of a community associated with said first server, establishing a data network connection between said third server and a computer, and between said computer and a voice enabled device.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein said step of transmitting comprises the step of pressing digits to generate tones indicative of a data network address of a called party.

14. The method of claim 12 wherein said data network address is that of a gateway that interfaces the data network to the public switched telephone network.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein said data network address is that of a computer equipped with voice capability.

16. The method of claim 11 wherein one of the servers contains a table that includes the identifier, and wherein the network address associated with said identifier in the table may be changed by said called party, and wherein said request remains the same irrespective of changes made to the table.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the table comprises information indicative of which one of at least two networks are to be used to contact the called party.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein the table comprises several prioritized sets of information to contact the called party, at least one of which includes an address on a telephone network, and at least another of which includes an address on a data network.